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ABSTRACT

Vocational opportunities for the language major are classified in two major groups in this article. The first focuses on vocations in which a knowledge of a language is the prime requisite for employment; the second group concerns vocations in which knowledge of a technical skill, trade, business, or profession and a knowledge of a second language are required. Comments are intended for those seeking positions in education, business, and government. Other career opportunities in travel, libraries, and publishing are cited. A short bibliography is included. (RL)

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VOCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE MAJOR

I like languages and I'd like to major in one, but I don't want to teach. What else can I do with a language major?" How many times have we teachers heard students say this! And our answer often is very indefinite. We mention something about opportunities for translators or for jobs in government service, without really having much knowledge of the vocational possibilities that exist for such language students, hoping in this way to retain the student's interest in the language as a vocational possibility.

In this short article, I shall summarize briefly some of the articles I have read about vocational opportunities for the foreign language major, my own personal experiences and those of some of our students. Those who want more information should consult the short bibliography at the end of this article. The articles referred to give information in more detail and also have more complete bibliographies.

First of all, we counselor-teachers should recognize and make the language major aware of the fact that there are two kinds of vocational opportunities for him. In the first group fall those vocations in which a knowledge of a language is the prime requisite for employment. In the second group are those whose first requisite is a knowledge of a technical skill, a trade, business or profession, and secondly, knowledge of a foreign language. We should be honest with the student and let him know that those vocations whose first requisite is competence in a foreign language are really very limited, if we except teaching. Teaching, interpreting and translating fall into this classification.

Teaching is an interesting career and has some good fringe benefits. I know from personal experience that many language majors who do not plan to teach when they begin their college study, become teachers. There are still opportunities for elementary, secondary and college foreign language teachers, although there are not as many as formerly and, unfortunately, even this number is likely to decrease during the next few years. Also, there are interesting opportunities for teaching outside the United States. The Department of Defense Overseas Dependent Schools Program has some 300 schools in 28 countries. The Agency for International Development (AID) and the United States Information Agency (USIA) in its Bi-National Centers employ teachers, school administrators and education specialists. Assignments are for two years. Teachers also are needed by private schools and by church-related schools in foreign countries. Usually this will mean teaching English to the nationals of those countries.[1] In some Latin American countries, some oil companies such as Standard Oil have elementary schools for the children of their employees. And, finally, the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare offers some exchange-teacher grants.

Interpreting and translating are the "glamour" careers to many language majors who see themselves employed by the United Nations, for example. The United Nations does employ interpreters, translators and précis writers but these jobs are very few in number and require a type of fluency and skill not usually acquired in a college classroom. Interpreters, for example, must have a university degree, special training in one of the four official U.N. languages and perfect auditory comprehension in two other of these languages. Previous experience is

1 Students interested in obtaining a teaching position in Latin America should write to Inter-American Schools Service, 1785 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington,D.C.

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also required. Translators and précis writers must be able to translate into English from French, Russian and Spanish and should have a wide knowledge of law, economics or technical subjects.[2]

The United States government also employs translators, interpretors and clerk-translators but in 1964 there were fewer than 500 of these positions in all the government agencies, according to the study made by Hardesty. Most of these are in the Departments of State, Health, Education and Welfare, and Defense. Persons must be qualified in more than one foreign language and must be able to translate and interpret material both into and from English. Competition for these jobs is very great.

On the other hand, there are almost unlimited vocational opportunities open to language majors who have a technical skill, trade or profession. Again, the United States government is the biggest single employer of bilingual persons. Among the agencies employing such persons are the Foreign Service Corps (Foreign Service Officers, Foreign Service Reserve Officers and Foreign Service Staff), the Armed Forces, Customs, Immigration, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency and the various government libraries. The United Nations also has many clerical and secretarial positions which require a knowledge of a foreign language. Again, language competence is not the prime factor in securing employment. Rather, language competence is an auxiliary skill. Bilingualism often helps the applicant get a more interesting and challenging job with a better salary. Such jobs range from clerks, typists, secretaries, nurses and librarians, to research and science information specialists and foreign service officers.

Other government agencies that need bilingual people are the Peace Corps, the Agency for International Development (AID), and the United States Information Agency (USIA). The Agency for International Development needs technicians and specialists in education, public health, commerce and transportation, public administration, agriculture, etc. The United States Information Agency, which sponsors the Voice of America, needs bilingual persons in the United States and abroad to prepare materials to be broadcast in 39 languages to other parts of the world. They also need such people for television and motion picture work and for their various publications. The jobs again vary from highly trained technical positions to those of secretaries and clerks. The USIA also operates 179 Bi-National Centers and 231 libraries in 87 countries and these are staffed by people from the United States. The assignments are for two years.

Many of the personnel in the government libraries, and especially in the Library of Congress, are required to have a knowledge of at least one foreign language.

The opportunities for bilingual persons in the armed services are often very good and many a young man has been placed in a better-than-average job because he had studied a foreign language or indicated that he had a liking or an aptitude for learning a language. And remember, the armed forces offer opportunities for women, too.

Professional people--chemists, accountants and auditors, lawyers, engineers, architects, geologists, doctors, social service workers, sociologists, psychologists and psychiatrists, nurses--often find that even though they never leave the United States, a knowledge of a language and familiarity with the culture of one of our

2 Richard T. Hardesty, compiler, Translating Foreign Language into Careers (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University, 1964), p. 10.

minority groups can be a source of great personal satisfaction as well as financially rewarding. Some professional people such as geologists, mining, petroleum and aeronautical engineers often are employed in foreign countries.

Another group of vocations in which language ability is important are those having to do with communications. Radio and television stations and networks, newspapers and publishing houses are possible sources of employment. Radio and television stations need announcers who can pronounce correctly foreign names and phrases. Actors and actresses are sometimes given roles that require a knowledge of foreign words or a foreign language. The newspaper reporter who can communicate with a minority group in his home town has an advantage over his colleagues without such an ability. Also, reporters and writers for newspapers certainly should have some idea about the spelling of foreign words and their meanings. Foreign correspondents need to be fluent in the language of the country where they are working.

Occupations that center around travel also afford opportunities for the language major. Airlines need hostesses, stewardesses and stewards, pursers, reservation sales management personnel, tour specialists, secretaries. If these persons hope to be employed overseas they need to know a foreign language. Travel agents need tour conductors, guides, etc. Hotel and motel managers and personnel also find bilingualism a help.

Publishing houses offer many possibilities for employment. There are firms that translate and publish foreign language books and periodicals in such fields as literature, education, science and industry. They need translators, editorial assistants, copy-readers, copywriters, consultants, research statisticians and technical writers who are competent in a foreign language. There are also some commercial translating agencies that often work with these publishing houses. Requirements for the top jobs are very high. They usually prefer that natives translate into their own language and translators are expected to know more than one foreign language thoroughly. They are also expected to have a scientific or technical background or to have real literary ability.

Librarians who work in public and private libraries often are required to have a knowledge of one or more foreign languages.

The possibilities that exist in business to obtain attractive and better-paying jobs because of a bilingual ability are very numerous, but, again, remember that in most cases, bilingualism is a secondary asset and the student needs to prepare himself well for some specific type of work. In any community of any size, there probably are a few firms that do business overseas. The port cities, however, offer the most opportunities. Examples of businesses that might offer employment opportunities to the well-prepared language major are banks, advertising agencies, the airplane industry, chemical companies, oil companies, manufacturers of farm machinery, motel and hotel chains, import-export companies, shipping companies, food-processing companies and automobile sales companies.

And, finally, some non-governmental organizations that employ bilingual persons are the Pan American Union, the Red Cross, the Y.M.C.A., the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Friends Service Committee, the Ford Foundation, the

American Institute of Pacific Relations, Inc., the American International Association for Economic and Social Development, the Asia Foundation, the Free Europe Committee, Inc., and the Institute of International Education.

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